

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – May 21, 2001

**Report highlights problems in college readiness, participation,
and achievement among Washington students**

OLYMPIA – Large numbers of Washington students are poorly prepared for college and fail to complete their degrees once enrolled. This “readiness and achievement” gap is especially significant among African American, Hispanic and Native American students.

These are among the key findings of a report on postsecondary opportunity and achievement, which will be presented to the state Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) at its meeting in Cheney on Wed., May 30. The report looks at indicators of readiness, participation and achievement for Washington students with a focus on the broad span of students’ careers.

“Washington State does a great job of offering its citizens broad access to college, but, clearly, we must improve how we prepare our students for college and help them complete their programs and degrees,” said HECB Executive Director Marc Gaspard. “To ensure that all of our citizens have the opportunity for college success, we need to better understand the full scope of barriers our students face from kindergarten through college.”

Among the highlights of the report:

Readiness

- One in six public high school students (17%) drops out of high school, with rates sharply higher (27-36%) for African American, Native American and Hispanic students.
- Of the students who continue directly from high school to college, just over one-third (36%) take a remedial course in their first year of college. Academic preparation is particularly lagging among African American and Hispanic students, with one-half (50%) enrolling in a remedial course as first-year college students.

Participation

- An estimated 63 percent of public high school graduates continue on immediately to higher education. Very little racial and ethnic disparity exists in college participation, largely due to the broad and open access offered by the state community and technical college system. Asian/Pacific Islander students are the exception, with 71 percent continuing on immediately.

- About one in three of these students (35%) enrolls at a two-year college or private vocational school, with students of all racial and ethnic groups equally likely to enroll.
- One in four of these students (26%) enrolls at a four-year college or university. Rates of continuation vary widely across ethnic and racial groups, ranging from 16 percent among Hispanic graduates to 35 percent among Asian/Pacific Islander graduates.

Achievement

- One in four (24%) full-time degree-seeking students completes an associate degree within three years, with rates moderately lower among Hispanic students (20%) and sharply lower among Native American (15%) and African American (8%) students.
- Sixty percent of all full-time students at public four-year colleges and universities complete a bachelor's degree within six years at the school where they began, with lower rates among Hispanic (53%), Native American (49%) and African American (45%) students.

Gaspard said the Board will focus next on pinpointing the barriers to greater opportunity and achievement and then on developing recommendations for Gov. Gary Locke and the Legislature. Recommendations could range from changing state financial aid or transfer policies, to forging stronger partnerships between K-12 and higher education, he said.

At its May 30 meeting, the Board also will hear presentations from Spokane-area college and university presidents and business leaders. Topics include how colleges and universities are responding to the needs of the community and articulation/transfer issues between the two-year and four-year schools.

The Board will meet at 8:15 a.m. at Eastern Washington University in the Pence Union Building, Room 263-267, in Cheney. Briefing documents for the meeting, which is open to the public, are available online at <http://www.hecb.wa.gov/intro/packets.html>

In addition, Board members will tour the EWU campus and downtown development area, and then attend a dinner at the home of Pres. Stephen Jordan on Tuesday evening. No official business will be conducted at that time.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board is a nine-member citizen board that makes recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on higher education budget priorities and policy and administers all of the state's student financial aid programs.

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